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INDIA AND CHRISTIANITY.

A Sermon,

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, DECEMBER 12TH, 1857,

BY THE REV. JOHN CUMMING, D.D.,

AT THE NATIONAL SCOTCH CHURCH, CROWN COURT, COVENT GARDEN.

“And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosannah to the son of David; they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.”—Matthew xxi. 15—17.

I wish to-day, and particularly this afternoon, to address you, first of all, as children attending our schools, and receiving the blessings and the benefits of a christian education, and secondly, as those who sympathise with these children, and are anxious to see the recipients of the greatest gifts made the ministers of the greatest goodness. I have taken, therefore, a text suggestive of thoughts instructive to the young, and that cannot fail in some degree to enable me to convey information and useful suggestions to the old. The young will thus be encouraged in their missionary efforts, and the old, sympathising with them, will feel it their duty and their privilege to aid them.

Let us look, then, at the scene which is here submitted to us—first, children exactly the same in years and in nature as those hundreds of little ones I now see before me, had learned under the parental roof that Jesus was the Messiah, and inspired by the old lesson, they went into the temple and gave expression to the public thanksgiving—“Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” The first lesson taught is, therefore, that Christian home education is the best preliminary to effective spiritual public worship. These children had never so praised in the temple if they had not been previously taught in their own homes. Thus having been taught under the domestic roof, and having heard there that Jesus was the Messiah, they no sooner saw him in the temple, than they formed themselves into an impromptu choir, became choristers and burst forth into the sweetest music that ears can hear, sweeter than angel’s harps can fling upon the winds, the music of children’s glad voices praising and blessing God.

Now, the second truth that we learn from this, is that the Scribes and Pharisees were exasperated by the irresistible proofs that Christ was the Messiah. You will notice, they could withstand his miracles, they could resist his lessons, they could repudiate with scorn his proclamations of the truth; but when they

heard children so unsophisticated by prejudice, and so little likely to be biased by early prepossessions, no sooner seeing Christ than they expressed their admiration for him, and their adoration to him, and shouted, "Hosannah, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"—the moment that they heard them do so, they felt that an infant's testimony was more effective than an orator's speech, and they appealed therefore to Jesus to put to silence these little ones, and not suffer them to be heard. But how did Jesus treat them? He instantly answered their objection, not by a long argument, but by a short and conclusive text—"Have ye not read what is written in the eight Psalm, that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God has perfected praise?" In other words, "You Pharisees and Scribes believe the Old Testament if you do not believe in me. I appeal to your own book, I take one of your own Psalms, and in that Psalm you will find a warrant for these children. Instead of being angry with these babes praising me, you ought to rejoice that they have been so well taught and that God's word so truly sanctions them, for in your own Old Testament scriptures, we have evidence of children's duty to praise and thank God."

This, then, teaches us a very valuable lesson. That society, of whom these Scribes and Pharisees were the representatives, is very apt to undervalue the force of religion in children; but it is quite possible for a young child to be an eminent Christian. God can change the young heart as well as the old heart, and the power to change an infantile heart is not so great as that which is requisite to change the adult heart. Here Jesus recognises infant's songs, and shows that these infants in the midst of the temple praised him as the fulfilment of the promise, and as evidences of the truth of the Word of God, who had declared that "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, he had perfected praise." In reading the New Testament, we must often be struck with the fact that Jesus regards children as of importance. We notice that he selected a child in the midst of the tumultuous crowds that were about him, and placed that child upon the platform beside him, and said, "Except you, the wisest, the most learned and the best, become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." What a tribute to a christian child is the solemn declaration that old people must become like them before they can enter into the kingdom of heaven! Our blessed Saviour especially welcomed children, when their ragged mothers brought ragged children in their bosoms to the Son of God, and when the disciples, far less sympathetic than their blessed master, repelled them as if it were an intrusion and an offence, Jesus beautifully replied, "Suffer them to come unto me"—what a testimony to children again—"for of such is the kingdom of heaven;" as if he had said, These are not weeds that you should trample under foot, but young, fragrant, beautiful flowers, to be transplanted to the paradise of God. These are not worthless things to be cast away as the refuse of the kingdom of heaven: but these are the little ones who, if they die in infancy, are transplanted there, and who, if spared to years, may be converted and sanctified, and made meet for the kingdom of heaven, and useful in spreading the knowledge of it among all kingdoms, and nations, and people. I have often noticed, in tracing the character of our blessed Lord, that he shows singular delight in young children, and I never saw an aged christian, of a truly affectionate character, who

did not love young children, and you must have been struck, on reading the history of our blessed Lord, how interested he seems to be in young children. In reality, he was the great model Sunday school teacher, and some of his best, and most glorious lessons are drawn from the habits of young children. For instance who would have thought that while Jesus was beating the weary road of life, his whole soul absorbed with the weightiest and most solemn thoughts, he could for one moment have turned aside to a market place, and there noticed children playing at marbles, or playing at hide and seek, or some other infantile and innocent amusement, and that he should have drawn one of his religious exhortations from children playing in the market place. What an evidence is this that our blessed Lord took special notice of children! while he sanctified their hearts by his grace, he consecrated children's play, and therefore children's playing grounds, by his own great and precious blessings.

In the next place, we shall find in the New Testament provision made especially for the well being of children. Parents are charged to bring them up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord:" and children are to obey their parents in the Lord. Again, we shall find special importance attached to the early history—the infant history, if I may so speak—of Moses, of Joshua, of Samuel, of David, and the Baptist. Again, we shall find a whole psalm written specially to bring forth and to commend the praises of children. Again, we shall find Jesus expressing joy, and rejoicing in spirit, on one occasion only; and when was it that Jesus rejoiced in spirit? When he said, "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, but hast revealed them unto babes." All these passages clearly show the deep interest which Christ felt in children—the watchful eye with which he followed them—the sympathy which he felt with their very playthings and amusements—and the illustrations that he drew from the infant life in favor of the purest and highest christian attainments. The whole of the passage that I have read is evidence that God may be glorified by the praises of children—"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise"—that is, God gets glory from infants at the breast, and children at their play. And in what respect does he do so? I answer, first of all, it is to God's glory that there should be infants at all. He might have made humanity as he made Adam, in its manhood, its perfection and its strength, leaving it gradually to decay and sink into old age; but he has not done so. We have children. If we had only old persons to preach the gospel to, how little success should we have! Man in middle age becomes hardened, impracticable, and difficult to be impressed, and few of such, comparatively, enter into the kingdom of heaven! but in childhood the heart is susceptible like wax, and the impression is lasting as welded iron. On children you may produce rapid, deep, permanent impressions. With the old it must be line for line, and precept for precept, before the Ethiopian changes his skin, or the leopard his spots; and therefore it is to the glory of God that a very large portion of every congregation consists of children. And if we preach to these, it is by an arrangement scarcely less satisfactory, when in a separate place we can have a sermon preached to them specially adapted to their childish minds.

Again, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, God perfects praise" in

an indirect way. Have you not noticed a softening influence produced in a home by the presence of infants in it? A household composed exclusively of adults, is material, mechanical, and commonplace; but a home in which children predominate, has a halo and a sunshine cast upon it, that nothing else can communicate. What flowers are in a garden, children are in a home, giving to that home a poetry and a beauty that their absence destroys. Children also are suggestive to many of the best and the ripest saints. I will tell you an instance, and if children listen to me, I hope they will not forget it. Melancthon, the very celebrated Reformer, the opposite of Luther in manner, but the very brother of Luther in love, and faithfulness, and light, one day went in company with Luther to a few friends who were assembled to consult as to the success of the reformation. Melancthon left greatly depressed, and in great sorrow, and thinking that there was no power that he could see which could be equal to the great and predominating superstition that oppressed them. As he went from the council, and was passing along the street, he saw a group of little children from seven to fourteen years of age, and he noticed that one of them was kneeling at prayer. He listened, and he heard that child praying as he had learned to pray at home, for that is the first school and church to a child—praying to God that he would help blessed Melancthon and Luther, and would enable them to conquer the enemies of christianity and Jesus. Melancthon, when he saw this, went back to the council, and said to Luther, “Dear Martin, be of good cheer, for I have seen the very children on the streets praying for a blessing on our labors, and if out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God has perfected praise, he will no doubt give to these children’s prayers a blessed answer.”

In the next place, God glorifies himself, or gets praise from children, by making children capable of deep and lasting impressions, and in these children creating all the beauty and the perfection of the maturest saint. I do not say that a child’s language is the evidence of grace; I do not think that children ought to be taught to use the phraseology of christian experience, when there is no counterpart of that christian experience within; but it is true that a child may become by grace a great and true a christian, as a man thirty or forty years of age. Have you never seen, when you looked through an oxyhydrogen microscope, that the insects in a drop of water have as perfect and complete an organism as the animals we see around us? I have seen the blood vessels beating and palpitating in an insect so small that you could not see it with the naked eye, and that required a prodigious magnifying power to make it visible at all. In the organism revealed in the microscope, you have all the organisation of an animal as perfect as an elephant or a horse, or in the largest creature that swims in the ocean, or breathes in the air, or spreads its wings upon the wind. So it may be that in the youngest christian there may be developed as perfect a christian character as in the maturest saint; and hence, we have sometimes discovered, however rare, in children young in years, all the parts developed, if not perfected, of saints old in grace, and ripe for the kingdom of heaven.

Again, God gets praise from children when he takes them to himself. What a solemn thought is it that half the human race die before they attain seven or eight years of age; what an evidence of the havoc of sin; but what a blessed

thought that fact suggests, when we learn from the scripture, as the most casual reader of it may discover, that all infants dying in infancy and before years of responsibility, are without exception justified, sanctified, and saved. I believe that infants dying before seven or eight years of age, baptised or unbaptised, children of heathen parents or children of christian parents, are without exception, God's elect children, whom he takes, in special love, to himself, saves from the pilgrimage, snares and martyrdom of this world, and transplants them from the garden of grace, cold, and wintry, and poor, to the garden of glory, where they blossom in everlasting beauty, and by their fragrance send forth incense of thankfulness, adoration, and praise, to him who redeemed them and washed them in his precious blood.

Now, having shown how God takes praise from the lips of children, let me turn your attention to one field on which especially I am requested to address you, and for whose benefit I am requested also, and I do it with the greatest delight, to ask your countenance, co-operation, and aid. We have Day schools, Sunday schools and also Ragged schools, and we are increasing them on all sides. We have a vast body of children, many of whom, in our ragged schools especially, are taken from the very lowest depths of degradation and shame. We are most anxious, not simply to teach children, but to train children. Now, one thing we teach them is, to make a sacrifice for spreading the gospel at home and abroad, and one of the things we try to train them in—not only to *teach* them but to *train* them in—is the habit of giving to that object. If you can induce one of your children to give up a halfpenny a week to swell the contributions to missions, you have done more than a thousand lessons from the teacher's desk can do. You have thereby trained a child to give, and what it does constantly when young, it will not leave off very readily when it grows old. Now, the special field on which I wish our children to act—and I need not tell you that we have raised up some years thirty or forty pounds towards the spread of the gospel, and therefore it shows that our teachers are training the children as well as teaching them—now the field on which we think they should expend especial labor, is that field, the scene of so many stirring recollections and of so many painful anxieties; the field on which so many of our brave soldiers have shed their blood, and where so many of the best and choicest of our country have suffered such revolting and unspeakable cruelties. It is the duty, first of all, of our country, to vindicate the law, to punish the mutineers, to repress insurrection, and restore the balance of law, of rule, of subordination and order; and that seems likely to be near, and we thank God for it. But the question is, what is to be done with the Hindoos and Mahometans after we have subjected them to law and order? I conceive that our first duty to them, more pressing and paramount than ever, is to bring them to the knowledge of that gospel which, by the admission of the world itself, is the only guarantee for India's prosperity and progress.

Now, in speaking of this subject, let me remark, in the first place, that India is ours in the providence of God; for a hundred years it has been part of our empire. How we got it I do not discuss; by what steps it was attached to this country I do not stop to discuss; for who does not know that if you trace back

a nobleman's title and patrimony to its first bestowal upon him, you will have a very doubtful opinion indeed of his right to it? That if you trace the history of our country you will find, that Norman, Dane, and Saxon, have in succession warred and quarrelled about it, and that if you were to trace it back to its first conquest, it is questionable whether you, the inhabitants of London, have the best right to the country you now live in. We find ourselves, in the providence of God, the inhabitants of highly favored Britain. It is our country and our home. We find ourselves, in the providence of God, the possessors and the lords of the vast empire of India. It is not necessary to discuss the policy of the first step; it is enough to assert the historical fact, which no one can deny. Now, suppose what some have asserted, that England, and Scotland, and Ireland, the lords and possessors of India, were to withdraw from it, would it be a blessing to India, or would it be the reverse? I answer, it would be the reverse. The very greatest curse that could fall upon India would be our withdrawal from it. Hindoos are incapable of self-government; they are like children in a school—they require to be ruled by a master; they are not intelligent subjects to constitute a well-governed nation. We can leave America to itself, for America can govern itself; but you cannot leave Hindostan, for its inhabitants cannot govern themselves.

Again, the Mahometans, though not the most numerous, are the most powerful in subtlety, genius, and ferocity, and the instant we left India, the Mahometan would take our place. Would the crescent be an advantageous substitute for the cross? If the Mahometan were to take our place, you would find that the Rajahs and Princes who govern India at this moment, would pull the whole country to pieces, in contending who should be the supreme and all-powerful ruler. Therefore, suppose that we were dastardly enough to say, let us leave India, I see in it the greatest calamity to India, and therefore it is our duty to hold it fast, and to feel our responsibilities towards it.

In the next place, in reference to the recent mutinies, have we done what has provoked them? I mentioned, in my sermon this morning, how prone our country always is to find out somebody to lay the blame on for anything that has overtaken us, or has occurred to us, and then the moment it is over, it is forgotten. Now men have been very prone, and have tried very hard, to lay the blame of the recent mutinies upon the injustice and the severity of the rule of our country, or rather, of the East India Company and the government of India, and those sent out to rule the country. Now I want to show you how unreasonable this is. I do not mean to say that there have not been great and scandalous sins, great and scandalous injustice, but I mean to say, what I am prepared to prove, that that is not the cause of that revolt. The sepoys, or native soldiers, who constitute the army, have been indulged, and petted, and deferred to, to the very utmost, and they are the discontented and dissatisfied people. The farmers, the Zemindahs, and others, constituting the civil population, are at this moment paying their taxes, and that, with all the loyalty and quietness with which they pay them in times of peace. The only people who might reasonably say, we have been unjustly dealt with, are constitutional and quiet: and the only people who have been indulged and petted in a way deferential and almost submissive, are

the people who are in mutiny against our Country and our Queen. This shows that whatever be the cause, it cannot be unjust treatment of the civilians.

Again that vast and splendid empire must, it seems to me, be given to us, not to give situations to the young and to the very old; not to be a prize to the ambitious, but, as I humbly submit, to receive our light, our civilisation, and our Bible. It is our duty therefore, having India attached to our own empire, to send there those who are lights of the world, the representatives of our religion, as well as the representatives of our constitution, and that it is our sacred duty, in reference to India more than in reference to Africa, to seek the erring, to save the lost, and to bring that land to the reception of that blessed gospel, which, alone, is that righteousness which exalteth a people.

But, some have said, this very Christianity has been the spring of the mutiny that we are trying to repress. My answer is, facts are all against this, for what do we find? It has been amongst the sepoy soldiers, where Christianity was proscribed, that the mutiny has broken out. It has been in the Bengal army, where the lust, the cruelty, and the savagism of human nature has been exhibited in all its atrocity, that Christianity has been prohibited, so much so, that one man was dismissed because he became a Christian; it is in that army where the Christian missionary has had no reception, that the mutiny originated. Now, what a lesson is this, that amongst the Bengalese sepoys, and there alone, a revolt has taken place, and that amongst the Bengalese sepoys, and there alone, Christianity has been proscribed, kept at bay, defied, detested, and despised.

Let us learn another lesson. In those horrid and revolting cruelties inflicted upon men, women, and infants, when infants were tossed upon bayonets, and ladies of rank, and delicacy, and piety, were cut to atoms before their husbands, and young girls in the presence of their mothers, not one christian Hindoo is spoken of, or alluded to, or hinted at, as having taken the least part in it, or expressed any sympathy with it. As far as evidence goes, those cruelties were perpetrated by men who were not Christians, and therefore, I say that Mahometan superstition and Hindoo idolatry are at the root of this frightful episode in the history of that country, and that all the crimes that have stained its annals, are to be traced to those sources alone.

But the crowning argument still remains. I have shown you that only where Christianity was proscribed, only where the Bengalee Brahmin had absolute power, mutiny has taken place, but I strengthen that position, still more, when I tell you that in Madras and around that city where christian converts are numerous, where the country is dotted with christian temples as the sky is dotted with stars there has been perfect order, perfect quiet, no mutiny, no revolt. It is plain then, from this, and I rejoice to see that the papers are beginning to advocate it, that where Christianity has been the least, there mutiny and revolt have been the intensest, and that wherever, in India Christianity has struck the deepest and spread the furthest, there quiet, order and peace have been most perfectly maintained. The inference which I draw therefore, from the whole of this reflection is, the justification of the great truth, which the Church of Scotland was one of the earliest to embrace, and through its missionaries, more than half a century ago, to inculcate and uphold, that christianity will be the saving of India, that

you can attach it to the mother country by no other means, and that if you do not christianise it,— as Dr. Duff I recollect, more than twenty years ago, most powerfully taught—if you do not christianize it, as far as human instrumentality is able to do so, you will have, in India a mine that will one day explode, and devastate the whole population that are now the subjects of Great Britain. It therefore appears that the highest policy, and the noblest patriotism is in conformity with the gospel lesson, “preach the gospel to every creature.” If you would extinguish cruelty and crime; if you would lay down railways for the intercourse of different presidencies and people; if you would have a place for the employment of our children, and our children’s children; if you would put an end to cruelty, and dissension, and bloodshed; if you would save souls for heaven and for glory, taken from the kingdoms of this world, circulate the Bible and spread the gospel and win to Christ the length and breadth of India, and having begun to do so we are bound to carry out what we have begun. If we never make the attempt the responsibility will not be the same, for what awoke the Hindoos so powerfully against us? They said, these people are bent on making proselytes; but they added, they are determined to make us proselytes by fraud and by force, by the rifle and bayonet and the sword. We taught the Hindoos so much Christianity as showed them that we felt it a duty, having got light, to be light to others; but we have not taught them sufficient Christianity to show them that fraud and force are forbidden by the Bible that commands us to go into all nations, and preach the gospel; it is therefore our duty to persevere and give them those enlightened ideas and apprehensions of the gospel of Christ that will show them that it is our duty to attempt to christianize all the nations of the earth, and that we are strictly forbidden to use one weapon or to wield one instrument incompatible with spiritual and moral power and truth.

Such then, is the value of children, and such is the field on which we seek our children’s contributions, at this time, to operate. Let me ask you therefore children who in this congregation have money, and there are many such, and adults who have a penny or sixpence to spare, let me ask each of you to give something, and whatever you give, as you retire from this sanctuary will be put into our school missionary fund, and will encourage the children, not mind you, to be apathetic and inactive themselves, but it will encourage them to be active and zealous, and I shall hope to be able to tell you, at the close of the missionary year, that through the encouragement that you gave to our children’s efforts they have redoubled their efforts, and given their contributions like their songs of praise, to multiply hosannas, to him who is King of kings, by leavening that empire with the principles of love and light and peace, which is now the scene of so much crime and sorrow.

